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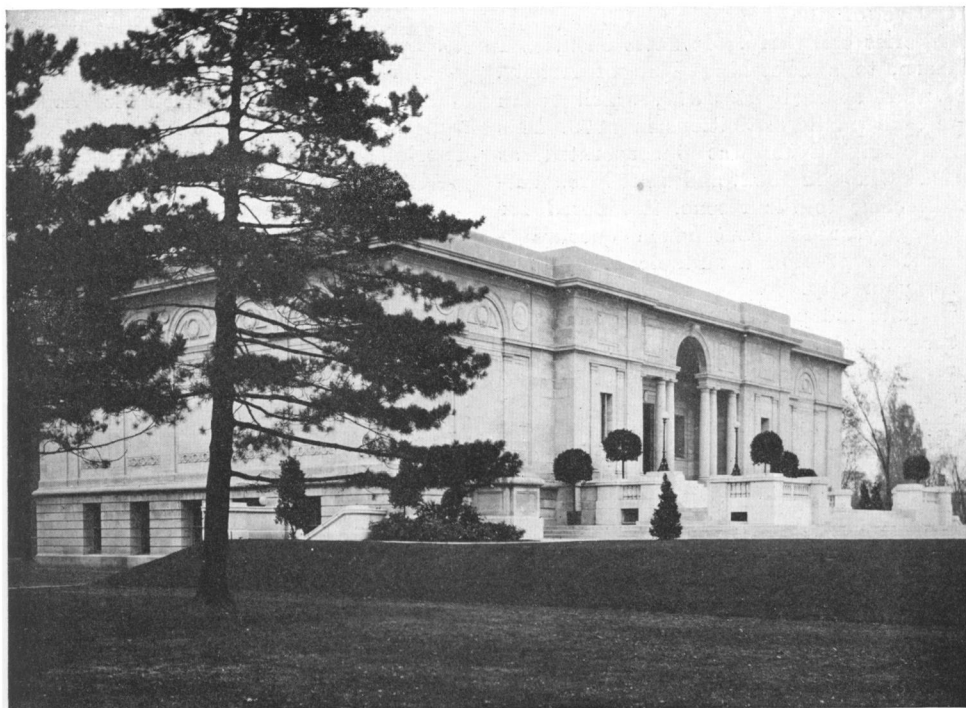
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THE MEMORIAL ART GALLERY

ROCHESTER, N. Y.

## THE ROCHESTER MEMORIAL ART GALLERY\*

BY ROBERT W. DE FOREST

PRESIDENT OF THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

UNDOUBTEDLY it would have been a great satisfaction to Mrs. James S. Watson, the generous donor of this beautiful art gallery, to have given it to Rochester even if the gift had not come in response to any conscious public need. The very presence of such a gallery would have created the need which it is intended to supply. But it must be a greater satisfaction for Mrs. Watson to know that in building this gallery she has realized aspirations and fulfilled hopes which date back to a generation that has passed away. They dreamt dreams, but I doubt if they ever dreamt so beautiful a dream as Mrs. Watson has turned into reality.

\*Address delivered at the dedication on October 8, 1913.

It is not unusual for a generously minded person to crave originality in the manner in which he expresses his public spirit. He likes to think, if not to say: "It was my idea." There is in this mental attitude a pardonable vanity. But many benefactions so conceived prove not to be beneficent because they only represent the desires of their donors. More honor to those who build on plans conceived maybe by others, but which have stood the test of examination and criticism. It is only when we build on such foundations that we can have any assurance that what we build will be useful and enduring.

I have learned of the genesis, as it may be called, of the art gallery which we are dedicating today. It is illus-

trative of the beginning of many art galleries elsewhere. It dates back, as I learn, to a Sketching Club of Artists, formed as early as 1872, which began to hold public exhibitions in 1875. This Sketching Club was incorporated as "Art Club" in 1882, and until Mrs. Watson came to the rescue, it labored for many years without much encouragement to provide a suitable art gallery for your city.

Quite independently of the efforts of these artists, the late Mr. Hiram Sibley formed a large collection of paintings and was public-spirited enough to exhibit them with other pictures brought together by the "Rochester Academy of Art" in 1874. This Rochester Academy of Art was, I infer, then organized quite independently of the Sketching Club, to maintain a School of Design and to conduct exhibitions of art. Mr. Sibley's hope that these pictures might become the nucleus of a public collection was apparently not realized, because of inadequate public interest.

Independently of any of these efforts, as I understand, Mr. Daniel W. Powers, as long ago as 1876, maintained his own collection practically as a public gallery, but whatever may have been his intentions in establishing an art gallery by giving his collection to the public, he died without carrying any such intention into effect.

Simultaneously with all these efforts President Anderson, of Rochester University, was giving lectures on the appreciation of the fine arts to his students, which, as I am informed, began as early as 1872 and continued until 1886.

All these efforts have now culminated in the beautiful building which you dedicate today.

Other art galleries have had the same beginnings.

The Albright Art Gallery of Buffalo, dedicated in 1905, originated in a Buffalo Fine Arts Academy, organized as early as 1862.

Our Metropolitan Museum of Art, practically organized in 1869, and incorporated in 1870, had its roots as far

back as 1802, when Chancellor Robert R. Livingston, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, then Ambassador to France, formed the "American Academy of the Fine Arts." Its special object was "to procure casts in plaister of the most beautiful pieces of ancient sculpture now collected in the National Museum (the Louvre)," the selection of which was entrusted to him. Foremost in this enterprise, of which he became president, were other men of prominence, both in the world of politics and the world of art—Aaron Burr, Robert Fulton, DeWitt Clinton, John Trumbull.

The American Academy of Art, started under such distinguished auspices, has long since passed out of view. The "plaister" casts which it brought over have long since disappeared. But the seed then planted nourished through many years by other like efforts seemingly abortive, finally blossomed out in the latter part of the century into our Metropolitan Museum of Art.

That is the way in which most institutions, worthy of being and enduring, have come into existence.

That is the honorable birthright of the gallery which we dedicate today.

Nor is the fulfillment of a long-felt need the only reason why Mrs. Watson should feel special satisfaction in her gift. There is another reason in that she has connected her gallery organically with a well-known university, thus emphasizing an inherent and intimate relation of the art gallery to education, which is the keynote in the art museum development of today.

Time was, and not so long ago, when galleries of pictures and statues were only the fads of kings and princelets, a part of the decoration of their gorgeous palaces and like the palaces, mere expressions of their pride and self-glorification.

What King of Saxony ever thought of educating his people or of even giving pleasure to any outside of his court surroundings, male and female, when he assembled the treasures of art which we now see in the great picture galleries

and the famous "Green Vaults" of Dresden?

To us the Louvre is the greatest repository of art on the Continent of Europe.

A little more than a century ago it was only known as one of the many palaces of a king. Almost every great art gallery of Europe, I think I may say every one on the Continent, has its origin in the ambition of some royal or next to royal personage, who, if he sought anything more than display, did not look beyond the gratification of his own taste and that of his companions.

Many of these galleries in their installation and in their use still bear the impress of this origin and are rather expressions of national, even of imperial grandeur, than a part of any broad educational scheme.

It has remained for the present generation to realize the relation between art galleries and education and to bring art galleries into their proper relation to the school and university. It has remained, too, for the present generation to realize that the fine arts of painting and sculpture, which have been represented almost exclusively in the art galleries of the past, are not the only arts, but only part of a great whole.

It is only today that the "Kleine Künste," as the Germans still call them, the industrial arts as some call them, have been given their proper relation to the fine arts and their proper place in art galleries.

While the fine arts minister to pleasure in esthetic enjoyment, the industrial arts minister not only to esthetic enjoyment, but to utility.

Thanks to modern methods of reproduction, notably photography, the once aristocratic fine arts have become democratic. The useful arts were always democratic. This elevation of the industrial arts to their proper place in the art galleries of the people is illustrated by the museums more recently established.

The "Victoria Albert," more popularly known as the "South Kensington" in London, with its branches in Edinburgh and Dublin, the Musée des Arts Décora-

tifs in Paris, the Gewerbes Museums which have been established in almost every important town of practical Germany, as well as our own Metropolitan Museum in New York, the Fine Arts Museum of Boston, despite its name, and the Art Institute of Chicago all illustrate this trend.

An art museum, however small, is an essential instrument of art education, whether for esthetic enjoyment or for utilitarian production.

Taste cannot be taught by words or learned from text-books. It cannot be expressed in any mathematical terms of signs or symbols. Nothing but the actual sight of things beautiful will enable us to recognize that which is beautiful and to ourselves create that which is beautiful, whether it be a picture to hang on our walls or a spoon to use on our table; whether it be a statue with which to decorate a public building or a knob for our bedroom door.

The intimate connection, I may also say the essential relation between art museums and education, is no new impulse in America. A majority of our American art museums have had their origin, if not in some educational institution, at least in some educational movement.

Of the seventy-nine art collections in America, great and small, of which I have knowledge, which are shown either in separate art museums or in museums of natural history or the like with an annex, thirty-four, nearly one-half, are organically connected with educational institutions. Of these thirty-four, twenty-seven are organically connected with colleges or universities and seven with libraries.

Many of them are insignificant—some few of them are beginning to be great.

Your Rochester Art Gallery is fifty-first on the list of American museum buildings that contain collections of art objects, whether exhibited by themselves or in connection with other collections of a different character. The rapid increase of art galleries in America, particularly in recent years, is highly encouraging to those of us who wish for

our country not only general appreciation of artistic things, but progress in their production.

Of the seventy-nine American institutions which exhibit collections of art, of which I know, ten were organized before 1870, only fourteen more were organized previous to 1890, twenty were organized between 1890 and 1900, and twenty-six have been organized since 1900.

I do not claim entire accuracy for these statistics. I have not compiled them with full knowledge of the facts. They are simply based on the most recent information which I happen to have, but they are accurate enough for my purpose, which is to illustrate the close relation between art museums and education and the rapid increase of art museums in America during recent years. You may argue from this brief review of the development of art galleries in America and their relation to education that the educational necessity for such galleries is universally recognized and the encouragement of art collections is a matter of acknowledged national concern. This is not so. A large part of our American people have still to learn this lesson, which to us assembled here is, I imagine, axiomatic. I will illustrate.

However inconceivable it may be to this audience, it is nevertheless true that within a few years our own great State of New York was so ignorant of the relation between art and education that it sought to tax a bequest to our Metropolitan Museum of Art on the ground that it was not an educational institution. I was at the time representing the Museum legally. It seemed to me such an inconceivable position for the State to take that I brought the matter personally to the attention of the then Comptroller. My appeal to reason was in vain. The tax was assessed by order of the Comptroller in spite of my explanations. I appealed to the then Surrogate of New York, a lawyer and judge in high standing. I thought that a mere statement of the purposes of the Museum would induce the Attorney General to consent to a reversal or at least secure a favorable judgment from the court. Not so.

To my amazement the legal representatives of our State took the position that our Art Museum simply gratified the luxurious taste of the rich, that it was to be classed as a place of amusement with the dime museums on the Bowery, and the learned judge confirmed the tax on the ground that our Art Museum was not educational! Fortunately for the reputation of our Bar and Bench this decision was reversed by the Appellate Division, and that reversal confirmed by our Court of Appeals. But the point is that as recently as 1909, only four years ago, it required a decision of our Court of Appeals to convince the representatives of our own State that an art museum was educational in its purposes.

I can draw an even stronger illustration of the ignorance which prevails among our people of the relation between art museums and education, in what has transpired respecting the tariff on art during the past few months.

I must begin a little further back to make my point.

Under every tariff act, whether framed under Democratic or Republican auspices since 1846, with a brief interlude at the close of the war in 1865, pictures, statuary and antiquities, including under the term "antiquities" every object of art more than one hundred years old, have been on the free list. In 1897 for the first time, pictures and statues were made dutiable at from fifteen per cent to twenty per cent, according to the country or origin, and antiquities were taxed according to material. A Greek vase made before the Christian Era was taxed as "decorative earthenware" in the same rate of duty as was applied to the most recent production of French "Nouveau art" "made in Germany." A Roman candelabra found at Herculaneum was taxed as so much bronze. This tariff went far to cut off the supply of American art museums. True—organized art museums could buy in Europe and import for themselves without duty, but our art collections are not made up that way. As generous as our people are, individual possession almost invariably precedes public gift.

I took part with others to change this tariff. The American Free Art League was organized in 1905. It labored in vain for nearly four years.

The cause of "free art" had almost universal support from our educative people and from the intelligent press North, South, East and West. It was not until the passing of the Payne-Aldrich Act in 1909 that we secured any relief and that was only in a degree. Pictures and statues less than twenty years old still carried the old duty. Antiquities over one hundred years old became free.

When the new tariff was under consideration during the past few months, there seemed to those of us who had been following the situation in the interest of our art museums no need for further action, except if possible to remove the duty on pictures and statuary less than twenty years old.

The Tariff Bill as reported by the House did this. It also continued the free importation of antiquities over one hundred years old.

To our consternation and amazement the Democratic caucus of the Senate increased the duty on pictures and statuary to twenty-five per cent and increased the age limit to fifty years. Still worse and still more inconceivably, when the Senate bill was reported the clause making antiquities over one hundred years old free was stricken out and the Greek vase and Roman candelabra, as well as all other objects of art, were taxed according to material.

Fortunately for the cause of American art museums, as those of us who have read the papers recently know, free art won out in the Conference Committee, thanks largely to the broadmindedness of Mr. Underwood, but it came near to being a defeat.

Therefore, it is plain that a great part of the American people and a great many of our public men who direct national and State affairs still have to be convinced that art at the present time is not merely the luxury of the rich, but is an essential factor in the education of every American, old or young, poor or rich. For only by such education (and

our art galleries are an essential part of our educational system) can we Americans come into our heritage of enjoyment of the beautiful in art and of profit, even if it be merely profit expressed in base coin, from the production of artistic objects.

Therefore all of us who are interested in the spread of art education, be it for one of the greatest pleasures of living or for gainful production, welcome the advent of every new art gallery and welcome the formation of every new circle gathered in the interest of art.

Example is, fortunately, catching, and Mrs. Watson by her gift has not only established the art center of Rochester on an enduring basis, but has encouraged the establishment of like centers elsewhere. We may therefore confidently look forward to the time when every important city in our country will have its art gallery, and when every judge on the bench and every Senator at Washington will realize that art collections fulfill one of the highest educational purposes, and should be encouraged by every means in their power.

### THE MURAL PAINTERS' EXHIBITION IN ST. LOUIS

As bearing testimony to the value of the exhibitions sent out by the American Federation of Arts the following extract published in the Annual Report of the St. Louis Public Library is significant: "The Library has become a member of the American Federation of Arts, and has displayed five of its exhibitions during the year. That of American mural paintings has attracted the most attention, having been seen by three thousand persons or more—many of them architects, decorators, stained-glass designers and students." \* \* \* As a result of these exhibitions (*those sent out by the American Federation of Arts and others arranged under local direction*) many people are using the Library who never used it before, and the number of books used in the room (*Art Department*) is decidedly increased.